

BANG HEADS HERE



SUFFERING  
BASTARDS!

STORIES BY CRAD KILODNEY



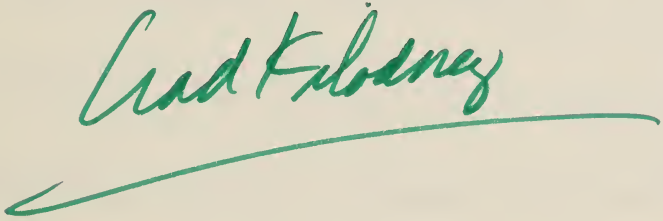
Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2014

<https://archive.org/details/bangheadsheresuf00kilo>

BANG HEADS HERE,  
SUFFERING BASTARDS

*Stories by*

CRAD KILODNEY



CHARNEL HOUSE

Toronto, Canada

Also by Crad Kilodney

*Mental Cases* (Lowlands Review, 1978)

*World Under Anaesthesia* (Charne! House, 1979)

*Gainfully Employed In Limbo* (Charne! House, 1980)

*Lightning Struck My Dick* (Virgo Press, 1980)

*Human Secrets -- Book One* (Charne! House, 1981)

*Human Secrets -- Book Two* (Charne! House, 1982)

*Sex Slaves of the Astro-Mutants* (Charne! House, 1982)

*Terminal Ward* (*Human Secrets -- Book Three*) (Charne!  
House, 1983)

*Pork College* (Coach House Press, 1984)

*The Orange Book* (Charne! House, 1984)

\* \* \* \* \*

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"Death of a Canadian Writer" appeared in *Alpha*, Vol.2,  
No.5 (1978)

"A Well-Adjusted Man" appeared in *Rustler*, Vol.1, No.5  
(1979)

"A Cowboy Story" appeared in *Griming Idiot* (1984)

Front cover by Arno Wolf Jr.

Inside drawing by Bruce Hutchinson

Book design by the author

\* \* \* \* \*

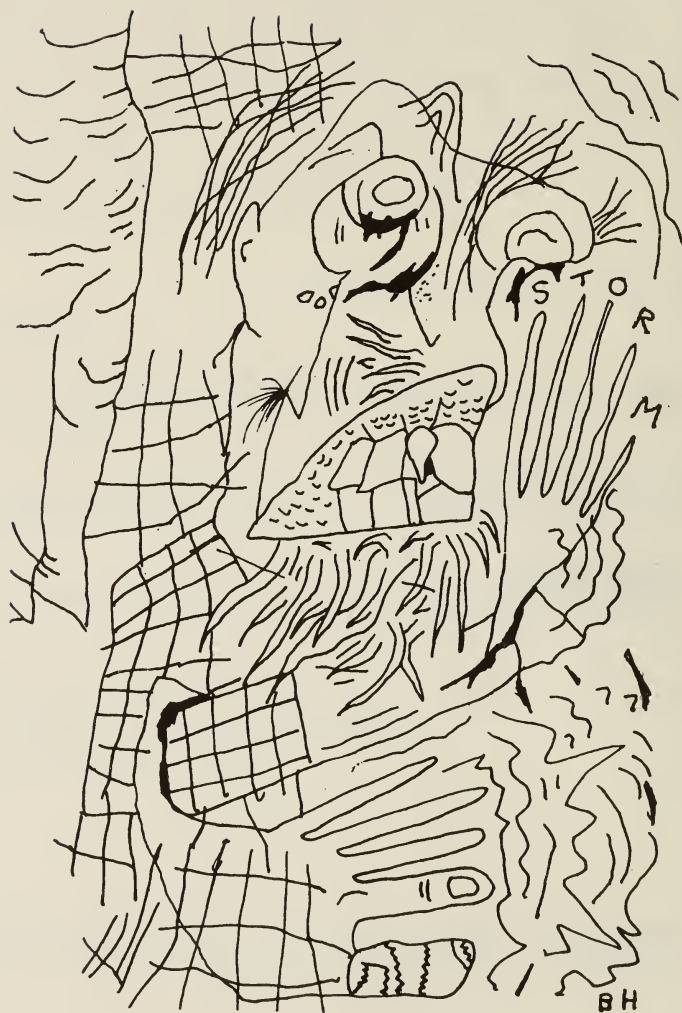
COPYRIGHT © 1984 by Crad Kilodney. All rights reserved  
under the Universal Copyright Convention. Printed in  
Canada.

ISBN 0-9690261-6-1

CHARNE! HOUSE, P.O. Box 281, Station S, Toronto, Ont.  
M5M 4L7 Telephone (416) 482-1341

## CONTENTS

<i>DEATH OF A CANADIAN WRITER</i>	5
<i>THE STORY OF A MAN WITH A BROKEN TOASTER</i>	9
<i>A WELL-ADJUSTED MAN</i>	28
<i>A COWBOY STORY</i>	35



BH

## DEATH OF A CANADIAN WRITER

On a brilliant summer night, the no less brilliant but undiscovered Canadian writer, Gerald Mullen, sat in the tenth row of the O'Keefe Centre watching *Carmen*. He was gazing at the stage and daydreaming about his manuscript, *Peat Mosses of Canada*, being published and winning the Governor-General's Award when suddenly -- and Mullen, being a writer, was in the habit of having things happen to him *suddenly* -- his face puckered up, he rolled his eyes, his breathing stopped, and..."Ah choo!"

There are no laws against sneezing in the O'Keefe or anywhere else. Everyone sneezes -- the Prime Minister, the Queen, illegal immigrants, everyone. Mullen calmly reached into his pocket for a tissue, but as he did so, he noticed the light-haired man in front of him wiping one side of his neck with his handkerchief. The man made a subtle tsk-ing sound of annoyance and turned his head just a little. In that moment, Mullen recognized him -- Jack McClelland, the publisher to whom he had submitted his manuscript!

*Oh, Christ!* thought Mullen. *I sneezed on his neck! He doesn't know me, but suppose when he calls me in to discuss the book he remembers me? Oh, my God! I'd better apologize!*

Mullen cleared his throat, leaned forward, and whispered in McClelland's ear: "Excuse me, uh, Mr. McClelland, I didn't mean to sneeze."

"It's okay."

"I'm really sorry! Jesus, I'd rather sneeze on my own mother than--"

McClelland turned around. "Will you please just forget it? I'm watching an opera!"

Mullen felt humiliated. He tried to concentrate on *Carmen* but couldn't. His daydreams were shattered, his career apparently cut short. All those years of work to write *Peat Mosses of Canada* and only one publisher that went in for that sort of thing -- McClelland and Stewart. And now...

When the intermission came, he caught up with McClelland



in the lobby. "Pardon me, excuse me. I'm the one who sneezed. Please forgive me. I'm awfully, terribly--"

"For Pete's sake!" McClelland exclaimed, eyes wide with disbelief. "I wasn't even thinking about it!" And he walked off to get a drink.

*Maybe he wasn't thinking about it, but now he's sure to remember me. If I don't get this straightened out before I meet him about the book, he'll never accept it. I'll have to explain...I couldn't help it...Everybody sneezes...A purely natural instinct...Suppose he thinks I did it deliberately? Maybe I shouldn't have said a word at all. No, it's too late now. I've gone too far to forget it.*

As soon as he got home, Mullen told the whole story to his roommate, another undiscovered Canadian writer, who would go down to Yonge St. near Dundas when the weather was nice and peddle his privately printed book. The roommate laughed. Mullen was annoyed. "Don't you realize what's at stake? McClelland and Stewart? On the spine of my book? Don't you realize what that means?"

The roommate was sobered by the thought. His own book, *Night of the Raging Moose*, had been rejected by M&S. "Yeah, maybe to be on the safe side, you should go and apologize again. Maybe it'll even work in your favor."

The next day, Mullen put on his best suit, put a maple leaf pin in his lapel, and drove to the offices of McClelland and Stewart very early. He persuaded the receptionist that he had urgent business of a confidential nature and begged to be allowed to wait outside the publisher's office until he arrived. After a half hour, McClelland arrived, briefcase in hand. Mullen jumped up to intercept him. "Mr. McClelland, I've come to apologize again for what happened last night. I assure you I never intended to sneeze on you--"

"Who the hell *are* you?" McClelland stopped and confronted him.

"I...I, uh...My name is Mullen. I sent you a manuscript a while ago -- *Peat Mosses of Canada*..." McClelland walked into his office, shaking his head, as the young writer followed him. "But, of course, if you want to change it to *Peat Moss* instead of *Peat Mosses*, you know, a collective singular noun, that's okay. I just hope you won't be angry about--"



"I don't know where your damned manuscript is," said the publisher, putting his briefcase on his desk. "I never saw it. It's probably in Editorial, if you want it." He began to shuffle some papers on his desk. "I'm having a conference now, so I can't talk to you." He stood at the door and made it clear that he wished Mullen to leave at once.

The writer walked out, tongue-tied for the moment, and headed slowly for the front door. Just as he was about to leave the building, he realized that he had not only failed to resolve anything but had added to his confusion. *Did he intend that I should take my manuscript back? Was he rejecting it when he said I could get it in Editorial? Or was that only if I wanted to take it? How was he to interpret the publisher's words? I can't leave it like this. He's obviously angry at me.*

So the writer headed back to McClelland's office. However, the door was closed. The conference had started. He would have to wait. It was nearly lunch time before the door opened and a young man and woman walked out. McClelland was up and reaching for his jacket. Mullen intercepted him again. "Sir, I beg you to accept my apology. I know I've been a nuisance, but if I hadn't sneezed, I wouldn't, that is, all this--"

This time McClelland walked up to him very slowly, glaring at him as he adjusted his jacket. "This is some kind of joke, isn't it? You're trying to have some fun at my expense, right?"

"No, I swear--"

"I'd appreciate it if you didn't come back." And he walked on.

"But what about my manuscript?" Mullen called after him.

"I told you I never saw it, and don't bother me about it." The publisher ducked into the washroom.

*Now it's worse than ever! I shouldn't have come here!*

As he drove home, Mullen's despair turned to anger. *So I'm making fun of him, huh? As if I enjoy doing this. Well, the hell with him! I'm not going to try to apologize any more! The son of a bitch! I'll just write him a letter and leave it at that!*

That night, as Mullen sat at his desk, he tried to collect his thoughts. But it was no use. The letter never came out as he wanted it. *What kind of a man am I?* he

thought. *Am I afraid to settle it face to face? Am I going to cop out? No, I'm going to do the mature thing and settle this once and for all in person, man to man.*

The following morning, he waited in the parking lot, disguised with dark glasses and a hat. When the publisher arrived, Mullen got out and caught up with him in the lobby. "Please, sir, yesterday I tried to show you how sorry I was about the sneeze, and I wasn't trying to make fun of you. Hell, there's nobody I admire more, nobody who has done more for--"

"GET OUT!" yelled McClelland, pointing toward the door. "GET OUT AND DON'T COME BACK!"

In the vital essence of Mullen's Canadian soul, something snapped all at once. A plug was pulled. A light went out. Like a sleepwalker, he shuffled out the door, went to his car, and drove home, his senses numb to everything around him. He did not even take off his glasses or hat or anything else, but merely lay down on his bed and died.

## THE STORY OF A MAN WITH A BROKEN TOASTER

Had Harold Ober not been, well -- to be blunt about it -- *cheap*, the misadventure to which he was an unwilling party would not have happened. When I say cheap, I mean in the monetary sense. In other respects, Harold Ober was capable of being quite generous. Many a failing student during his teaching career had passed, thanks to his kind heart. It was this pairing of opposite traits, along with the fact that he was one of the very few persons anywhere who still owned a Supremo toaster, that made for a special combination of circumstances that must have had the prescient Fates licking their ethereal lips in anticipation. The ancient Greeks understood this sort of thing much better than we do. You need only read their dramas to convince yourself that they knew exactly how the world works.

Now I ask you to picture a warm, sunny day in June. The pale blue sky is marked by a few fluffy white clouds. It is about noon on a Wednesday, Harold Ober's absolutely favorite time and day since his retirement. Why? Because it is the precise middle of the working man's week, and it is exactly then that Harold Ober savors most keenly the luxury of being retired. Retired *with financial security*, of course.

Picture Harold Ober smiling as he drives along the highway that runs through the city's northern suburbs. His 15-year-old Citroen is running smoothly on a set of re-treaded tires. His right foot, wearing a loafer that has been resoled and reheeled four times already, maintains just the right pressure on the gas pedal to minimize gas consumption. And a glance at his five-dollar flea market watch informs him that it is noon, which, as we have noted, is reason enough to evoke a sense of well-being.

Now we must backtrack slightly. On this particular morning, just one little thing has gone wrong. Nothing too terrible. It's just that the old Supremo toaster, which has seen Harold and his wife, Marion, through nearly forty years of marriage, has gone kaput.

The Broken Toaster Problem immediately divides mankind

into two groups: those who are disposed to buying a new one, and those who insist on fixing the old one. The latter love a challenge and are undaunted by expired warranties, searching for an authorized repair facility, or companies that have ceased to exist.

For Harold, the crux of the problem lay in the fact that he owned an extremely obscure and antiquated brand of toaster, a Supremo, which had been a wedding present from an acquaintance who had liked them, but not that much. It should be mentioned at this point that the name Supremo was not some merchandising man's way of being cute. The toaster had, in fact, been made in Spain. To say it was primitive would be a kindness. It was the Coelacanth of Toasters.

There were no authorized repair shops for Supremo in the Yellow Pages. None of the shops Harold called had even heard of the name. "No point bringing it in if we ain't got the parts," said one repairman after another.

A call to the Better Business Bureau led an earnest young lady through a maze of files until at last she unearthed an index card and informed Harold that the Supremo service contract had been held by Torquemada Electric, which went out of business in 1955. After that, there was nothing in the files.

Harold went back to the Yellow Pages and looked for Torquemada Electric, on the off chance the company might be back in business. No listing. He was about to close the directory when his eye snagged on a name in small type hiding among the bold type listings and display ads: Titan-Torque Electric. Just for the hell of it, he called them.

The voice that answered was polite enough until Harold asked, "By any chance, do you do repairs on Supremo?"

"On what?" the voice snapped back.

"Supremo. I have a Supremo toaster."

There was a pause. "Who's calling?" asked the voice, sounding suspicious.

"What do you mean, who's calling? I just want to know if you can repair a Supremo toaster."

"Hold on." A hand covered the mouthpiece, and Harold thought he could hear two muffled voices. The first voice came back on. "They don't make Supremos no more."

"Then you have heard of it," said Harold.

"Yeah, we heard of it."



"Did you used to be Torquemada Electric at one time?"  
The hand covered the mouthpiece again. More muffled talking.

"Hello? Hello?" said Harold.

"We bought out Torquemada Electric a long time ago," said the voice.

"So then you *can* repair a Supremo."

"Well...uh...", said the voice, clearing its throat.

"We don't do much trade in Supremo no more, but if you want to bring it in that bad, we'll have a look at it."

"Fine," said Harold. He verified the address and got directions.

And now here he was, zipping along the highway, terribly pleased with himself and confident that the old Supremo in the brown paper bag beside him would be repaired at less cost than a new one. But why had they tried to discourage him, he wondered. *Probably too cheap a job to be worth their while*, he decided.

Titan-Torque Electric was housed in a large, nondescript one-storey building on a street in a light industrial area. There was a wooden sign out front advertising "Authorized Service For" and then a column of names. The last name on the list had been squeezed in at the bottom in much smaller letters. *Supremo*.

There was a large parking lot but not many cars in it. The place looked very quiet.

Harold went through the door marked Customer Service and found himself in a small reception area with a few chairs, some display racks with kitchen appliances, and a broad counter behind which stood two men in dingy brown uniforms. One of them was bent over a large catalogue of electrical parts. The other was just taking a blender from another customer. "No problem, sir. Here's your ticket. It'll be ready Monday." Harold recognized the voice on the phone. The name *Mike* was stitched on the breast pocket of the uniform.

Harold took the Supremo toaster out of the brown bag and put it on the counter. "I called earlier," he said.

"Oh, it's you," said Mike coldly. His partner at the catalogue glanced over at the sound of something being placed on the counter and then did a double-take. He stood up straight, eyeing the toaster and Harold with fascination.

He and Mike looked at each other. "This is the guy I told you about," said Mike. The partner, named Rick, leaned over the Supremo toaster and picked it up.

"Isn't it time you bought something more up to date?" Rick suggested.

"Oh, no, you don't," said Harold, smiling. "I know you want to sell me something reconditioned you have lying around. If people repaired things instead of buying new ones all the time, the world would be a better place to live in."

Mike slapped a form on the counter and a pen on top of it. "Want to fill this out, please?"

Harold picked up the pen and began filling out the form -- name, address, phone, the usual things. Then he paused. Some awfully strange information was being asked for -- occupation, last three employers, place of birth, hobbies, organizations belonged to, religious and political persuasions, closest blood relative, police record..."What's all this?" he asked.

"Market research," replied Mike with a straight face.

"Oh...Market research...Hmm...Fine thing, market research. Very fine. Okay. Well, well. Let's see..." And he dutifully answered all the questions. "Am I going to get free samples in the mail? Ha, ha."

"Nope," said Mike without cracking a smile, as he took out a perforated ticket, tore it in half and gave the stub to Harold. "Come back on Monday, let's say around one p.m. Is that okay for you?"

"Sure, that's fine."

"One p.m. it is," said Mike, making a note on his half of the stub.

"Do you drive an Edsel?" asked Rick, grinning.

"No, of course not."

"A Packard? A Studebaker?"

"No, I have a Citroen," said Harold. He took his stub and left the building.

As he was starting his car, he could see Mike and Rick crowding each other by the door to watch him leave. They had strange looks, he thought. Not entirely friendly. *See, I told you it was a Citroen!* he thought telepathically for their benefit.

For the next four days Harold and Marion went without



toast. "Why don't you break down and get me a new toaster?" asked Marion.

"You can make toast on the oven rack if you're that desperate," said Harold.

The days continued warm and sunny and without a care, and if any little angel were whispering warnings, or even shouting them, into Harold's thick skull, he heard them not.

And so, inevitably, we find our retired teacher pulling into the parking lot of Titan-Torque Electric promptly at one p.m., Monday, beneath another near-perfect June sky, in the certain expectation of carrying away therefrom in but a few moments and at very modest cost a fully rejuvenated Supremo toaster that would be his faithful and functional companion unto death.

Harold got out of his car and headed for the service area. If the bill were less than \$10, he decided, he would pay them cash. If it were between \$10 and \$20, he would write them a cheque. And if it were over \$20, he'd let them keep the toaster, because he was pretty sure he could get a discontinued model in new condition for around \$22 at Jungle Jack's Clearance Centre.

He walked through the door and then stepped aside to make way for another customer carrying out a Sunbeam iron.

"Well, I'm here," said Harold, stepping up to the counter and putting his stub down. "One p.m. Right on time."

Mike was his usual serious self. Rick seemed amused. "It's Mr. Supremo," said Rick.

"Ober," said Harold. "But that's okay. Supremo's not a bad name, ha, ha."

Mike picked up the phone and dialed an extension. "The Supremo toaster is here," he said, with a hint of mockery. He listened for a second, then hung up. He lifted a section of the counter to allow Harold to pass through. "Just come with me, please."

"All right," said Harold, stepping through.

Mike led him into a hall and along a labyrinthine course that made the building seem even larger than it looked from outside. As they passed open doors, Harold could see bins of spare parts and benches at which repairmen worked to the sound of AM radio music. Then there were no more open doors or happy workmen or music, and the long

and complicated course continued into a part of the building that seemed abnormally quiet and had no windows. "I hope the bill isn't too expensive," Harold said to make conversation. Mike didn't answer. "I'm sorry if I inconvenienced your staff," he added, as a vague feeling of uneasiness came over him. Mike led him down a corridor that was lit by only one feeble bulb. They were approaching a closed door. "I suppose I could have bought a new one," he conceded, "but it's important to, uh...it's..."

"Okay," said Mike, opening the door. "In here."

Harold looked in. It was a plain rectangular room, about the size of one of his old classrooms. There were several wooden chairs, a table, some file cabinets, cardboard boxes, an old desk with a telephone on it, and a calendar with the correct day indicated. The windows were completely boarded up. The room had that dead quality that suggested soundproofing. There was a gentle whir of a ventilator. The lighting came from one bright, unshaded bulb in the middle of the ceiling. There was another door at the other side of the room.

"What's this?" asked Harold nervously.

"Just have a seat, Mr. Ober."

"What's the idea?"

"Oh, it's just some more market research," said Mike, forcing a smile. "Perhaps you'd like some coffee and a sandwich, with our compliments, of course. You can smoke if you like. Someone will be with you in a second."

"Oh...well, thank you very much. That would be nice," he said as Mike went out, closing the door behind him. Harold sat down in a chair, and for a moment he imagined that he was sitting in his old schoolroom. That bare wall needed a blackboard, and something reassuring like a map or a little flag, and there ought to be the good old-fashioned smell of chalk dust and the gentle buzz of fluorescent lights. He sat there wondering what sort of questions they would ask him, and whether he'd get his toaster back for free as a reward for keeping such an old one, and what kind of sandwich Mike was going to bring him. The chair he was sitting on was not too comfortable. It had arm rests with no padding. *Hmm. There's a little stain here. What's this?* Harold listened to the sound of the ventilator. And then he thought he heard another sound mixed in with it.

But it was so faint, perhaps he only imagined it. Funny, but it sounded like a scream, very far off, very muted.

*Probably nothing.*

Just then the door opened, and three men walked in. The sight of them shocked Harold, for they were wearing brown robes with cowls in the manner of monks of a bygone age. Large crosses hung from their necks. The last monk shut the door. Harold stood up. "I was told to wait here. I'm sorry," he said, although he did not know exactly what he was sorry for.

One of the monks carried an ordinary manila folder. "You may sit down, Mr. Ober," he said stiffly in an accent that was vaguely foreign. All three of them gave Harold looks that were serious, if not actually menacing, and gave no inkling of their intentions.

"What's with the costumes?"

The first monk replied calmly, "We are dressed appropriately for the occasion."

"Where's my toaster?" asked Harold. "And I'm supposed to get a sandwich."

The second monk parted his robe and produced a sword, while the third produced some ropes.

"Hey, what the--" The point of the sword was at Harold's chest in a second, and the monk with the ropes was swiftly tying Harold's arms and legs to the chair with a dexterity that bespoke much practice. "Help! Help!" screamed Harold. "I'm sorry about the toaster! I didn't mean to cause trouble! You can keep the toaster!"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped the first monk. "Conduct yourself like a man, for God's sake!"

Harold shut up but was shaking nevertheless.

"I am Brother Julio. This is Brother Dominic," he said, indicating the one with the sword. "And this is Brother Francisco," he said, indicating the one who had tied Harold up. Brother Julio sat down on the edge of the table casually and opened the folder. "Your name is Harold Ober."

"Yes, yes, but--"

"You are a retired teacher."

"Yes, but I--"

"You taught grade twelve English and grade eleven algebra at Fowler Secondary School from 1960 to 1982, correct?"

"How did you know that? I didn't mention my subjects on the form."

"The form is just a starting point. Given a starting point, there's nothing we cannot discover."

"I haven't committed any crime!" protested Harold. "I have no criminal record! I've never been guilty of anything!" He tugged at his ropes for a second, then gave up.

Brother Julio closed the folder for a moment. "Mr. Ober, how many grade twelve English students did you have in your career?"

"I have no idea. Thousands. Why?"

"How many did you fail?"

"Fail? Very few, I assure you. If you're related to one that I failed," he spoke very rapidly, "I can assure you that I bent over backwards to give every student every possible chance to pass! I'm not a cruel man, believe me! Without grade twelve English, they wouldn't get their diplomas, and I wouldn't hurt a student by denying him his diploma!"

"That's precisely the point!" shouted Brother Julio, standing up.

"Wh-what?"

"You gave passing grades to idiots and sent them out into the world with diplomas that were lies! Lies! You call yourself a teacher? I call you a fraud!"

"Oh, no, you don't understand!" said Harold. "Every student I passed deserved to pass! They could all do the work! Uh...There may have been a few borderline cases that I pushed over, but I can assure you their school work was adequate!"

"Really!" said Brother Julio with a malicious smile, staring down at Harold. "Any student passed by Harold Ober would be capable of doing grade twelve work!" It was clearly a question but was expressed as a sarcastic declarative.

"Sure," said Harold with phlegm in his throat. He coughed. "Of course, people do forget things once they leave school." Harold's mind was spinning like a tire on ice, not getting any traction. *What are they getting at? What did I do?* He tried to recall some flagrant sin in his past but could not remember any. "Look, can I just pay for my toaster and go home? I'm retired now, you know."



Brother Dominic whacked the side of Harold's chair, stinging his leg with the blunt side of the sword. "We're not kidding around, Ober! You're in hot water, you swine!"

Brother Julio said, "Bring in the boy." Brother Francisco left the room.

*Boy? What boy?* thought Harold.

Seconds later the door opened again. Brother Francisco brought in a young man in his early twenties. "Hey, Mr. Ober! How ya doin'? Remember me?" he said with a childish smile.

Ober stared at the long-haired fellow in jeans and T-shirt with a pack of cigarettes stuck up inside the sleeve. *It couldn't be!* Yes, it was. It was the class clown from 1980, the boy he had sent to the dean's office on numerous occasions, the boy who was a fixture in the detention hall, the boy who set fires in waste baskets and hung condoms over the doors of the girls' rooms. "Vinnie? Vinnie Muscatello?"

"Hey, right, Mr. Ober! You remember! Far out!"

"My God, what's the meaning of this?" pleaded Harold.

Brother Julio referred to the folder again. "Vincent Muscatello was one of the worst scholars in the history of Fowler Secondary School. He was in your grade twelve English class in 1980. His I.Q. is 73. He is functionally illiterate. You passed him. Not only passed him, you gave him a C-plus. C-plus means 'high average.'"

"Why pick on me?" said Harold. "I wasn't the only teacher who passed him along."

"No," interrupted Brother Dominic, "but *you* came here with a broken Supremo toaster!"

"Indeed," said Brother Francisco. "Our influence is not what it used to be, but we make the most of it. Ach, how times have changed! *España mía!*" He looked heart-broken, eyes directed upwards toward God.

"Vinnie!" said Harold, "You're not going to get back at me for sending you to the dean's office, are you? I'm sorry, truly sorry! If I can ever make it up--"

"Nah, nah, it's no big deal," said Vinnie. "Even though you were a real square, you weren't the worst, Mr. Ober."

"Ha, ha, thanks, Vinnie. I did pass you, didn't I?"

"Yeah, you did. And I don't think I did fuck-all work the whole year."

"There! You see?" said Brother Julio. "Which leads us to the why and wherefore of this meeting, if you'll pardon the redundancy."

"Huh?" said Harold.

"*Why* and *wherefore*. That's redundant," said Brother Julio.

"Yes, of course."

Vinnie was smiling through all of this like an idiot.

"Do you know what *redundancy* means, Vincent?" asked Brother Julio.

"No."

Brother Julio turned a twisted smile toward Harold.

"My brethren and I spent ten years in a monastery memorizing Latin declensions, and today young fools get diplomas without even knowing their own language!"

"Those were the days," added Brother Dominic wistfully.

"So today we are going to put young Vincent to a test -- a simple test of his verbal skills, for which he will be paid fifty dollars, regardless of how well or badly he does."

"Far out!" said Vinnie.

"If he passes the test to our satisfaction, you, Harold Ober, will be set free." A pause. "If, on the other hand, your former student, to whom you gave a C-plus in grade twelve English, thus certifying that he was fit to go forth into the civilized world and communicate with thinking creatures, *if* he should fail, then, Harold Ober, *you will be killed*."

"What? You can't be serious! You have no right to commit murder!" He tugged at his ropes again instinctively.

"In this room," said Brother Julio solemnly, "we are the law."

Brother Dominic went to the desk, took out a sheet of paper and a pen and brought them back and set them on the table. He brought a chair up to the table, facing Harold. "Young Vincent may sit here." The boy sat down, still grinning like a child at the circus.

"Ahem," said Brother Julio. "Now then, Vincent. Your task is very simple. You are to write a one-page essay on the topic of your choice in the general area of current affairs." He looked at Harold. "Vincent's essay will be graded on all the usual mechanical details, with one point off



for every mistake. The passing mark is sixty."

"Sixty?" said Harold. "It was only fifty in my school!"

"True, but you gave Vincent a C-plus, so sixty is more appropriate."

"That's not fair! Vinnie's been out of school for several years! Give me a break, will you?"

The three monks conferred for a few moments. Finally, Brother Julio said, "Okay, fifty-five, purely out of a spirit of Christian generosity. But I'm a tough marker. I'm going to mark everything I find. I warn you."

"Vinnie, don't let them kill your old teacher!" cried Harold.

Vinnie picked up the pen and poked his cheek with it.

"What was that subject again?"

"Current affairs."

"Does that include rock music?"

"Oh, God!" moaned Harold.

"Current affairs," repeated Brother Julio. "Matters of national or international importance. Perhaps some problem of our time."

"I don't keep up with that stuff."

"Tsk! Tsk! Then you fail automatically."

"No! No!" cried Harold. "Give him a chance! Think, Vinnie! Think! Give him a chance, for God's sake! Maybe he wants a coffee or a Coke."

"Hey, that's okay, Mr. Ober. I'll rev up the old brain. Hmm..." He looked up sheepishly at the monks.

"Don't look over his shoulder!" Harold admonished.

"Students hate that!"

"Very well. Come and sit, Brothers." The three monks sat down in the corner.

Vinnie adjusted his chair, sucked on the end of his pen for a moment, and said, "A problem. A problem. Hmm..."

One of the monks began whistling. Vinnie began to write something, then stopped, then began again, looking uncertain.

"Be careful," warned Harold. "Don't make mistakes."

Vinnie's brow was creased with the pain of intellectual effort as the pen clutched in his hairy paw bore down audibly on the page.

Singing was now coming from the corner of the room:

*In Fortune solio*

*sederam elatus...*

"Careful, Vinnie. Watch your English."

"Don't worry, Mr. Ober. It's coming along fine," said Vinnie, scraping along slowly.

*prosperitatis vario*

*flore coronatus...*

"My life is in your hands, Vinnie."

"Yeah, I know." Vinnie continued to fill the page with his childish penmanship.

*quicquid enim florui*

*felix et beatus...*

"Hey, you're disturbing him," complained Harold.

*nunc a summo corru*

*gloria privatus...*

"KNOCK IT OFF!" yelled Harold. The monks abruptly stopped singing.

"That's okay, Mr. Ober. I'm almost done."

Brother Julio smiled in anticipation.

Harold thought, *With a leeway of forty-five errors, surely this young nitwit can pass.* Perhaps he was worrying needlessly.

Vinnie was writing faster and with enthusiasm, and the expression on his face was one of genuine satisfaction. Finally, he put his pen down and asked, "Is this enough?" He had barely filled one side of a page.

Brother Julio came and looked over his shoulder. "Of course."

"Check it over first, Vinnie! Look for mistakes!" said Harold.

"I already did." He handed the paper to Brother Julio. "Here."

"Wait!" protested Harold, feeling a ball of iron in his stomach.

"Too late. He said he was finished," said Brother Julio, picking up the paper. He began to read it silently. A grin crept over his face. Then the grin became a broad smile. Brother Julio tried to suppress a laugh, but it snorted out of his nose. He guffawed. The other two came over and read over his shoulder, and they, too, began to laugh.

"Care to read it?" Brother Julio asked Harold.

"Yes," said Harold, feeling nauseous. Brother Julio

held up the paper before him and allowed him to read. Harold strained to make out Vinnie's handwriting. "Oh, my God," he muttered.

Here was Vinnie's essay:

*Dogs--A Big Problem*

*What is really a big problem for every one is when you step on dog shit. No body likes to step on dog shit. You can be on the beach, or in the park, or walking along the street, and before you know it your stepping on dog shit. Dogs shoud not be aloud to go anyware they want. They shoud go in the backyard. Dogs are a problem all over the world, it is truely the worlds comonest problem. When you walk your dog, it shoud be on a leesh so it dont run and bite some body. You shoud carry a peace of paper and a shuvvel and scoup up the dog shit and put it in a garbidge can. I dont like dogs to pee on my tires. I dont like running over dog shit ether. The dog shit smells and carrys gurms wich can cause desise. If a man dont control his dog, he shoud be find \$200. The seckond time \$500. The thurd time \$10,000. After the forth time--the dog shoud be locked up for a year while the man spends a year in jail. If it happens agen, the man shoud be hung. Its the only way to stop poeple getting away with murdur.*

"Vinnie, how could you?" Harold said, choking back tears.

"Hey, it was no sweat!" said Vinnie. He looked at Brother Julio. "I passed, right?"

"Well, let's see," said Brother Julio with a sadistic smile. He reached into his robe and pulled out a red Bic pen. He pulled up another chair and sat down at the table. "Remember," he said to Harold, "we agreed on a passing mark of fifty-five, which means that no more than forty-five errors will be allowed."

Harold gulped. "I don't think it's that bad."

Brother Julio scanned each line of the essay, and his red pen snapped down again and again with the alacrity of a viper biting its prey. "Misspelling...ungrammatical...

misspelling...misspelling...misspelling...misspelling...  
misspelling...misspelling...comma splice...improper pronoun  
...misspelling...misspelling...misspelling..."

"I get to check everything!" Harold demanded.

"One, two, three, *four* more misspellings...One, two, three, four, *five* more misspellings...Five in one sentence! Good work, Vinnie!"

"Uh, oh," said Vinnie. "It ain't goin' too good, looks like."

"One, two, *three* more misspellings...There's another *four* misspellings in one sentence...And, let's see...one, two, *three* more. Really, Harold. Tsk! Tsk! Didn't you teach spelling at Fowler Secondary?"

"Yes! Yes! Oh, my God!"

"Ah! Here's something different -- a sentence fragment!...Misspelling...another sentence fragment...misspelling...misspelling...wrong punctuation..."

"He's much better on punctuation!" Harold noted.

"Only because his sentences are so simple. Now, where were we?...Misspelling...Ha! That's pretty funny. I must say, Vincent, you have some remarkable ideas."

"Yeah? Thanks!" replied Vinnie, tapping the side of his head. "I knew I had a few in there somewhere."

"Misspelling...misspelling...wrong word. *Hanged*, not *hung*, Vincent."

"What?"

"A man gets hanged, not hung."

"How come? If a guy's got a big whacker, you say he's well hung, right?"

"He may be well hung, but he still gets hanged."

"Don't be a nit-picker! I've seen that mistake in newspapers!" said Harold.

"Wrong is wrong. Ahem, now let's see...misspelling...misspelling...uh...hmm..." He paused. "That's ungrammatical. And *murder* is misspelled. Now let's add up these misdemeanors."

"Hey, I don't got a record," complained Vinnie.

"Just kidding." Brother Julio started counting to himself, humming the numbers within his closed mouth to keep Harold in suspense. "Really, Vincent, this essay is a disaster."

"But other than that, what do you think of it?" asked



Vinnie.

"It's absolutely execrable," said Brother Julio, still counting.

"Yeah? Thanks!"

Brother Julio's expression became more serious as he neared the end of the essay, then brightened suddenly.

"Forty-four...forty-five...*forty-six!* That's one too many, Harold." He stood up. "You know what this means."

Brother Dominic unsheathed his sword again.

"HOLD IT! I want to see for myself!"

"Very well," said Brother Julio, holding the paper before Harold's face. "Forty-six errors marked in red. Count them."

Harold's expression was frantic as he verified one X after another. *Vinnie, you stupid asshole!* he thought. His heart raced with panic as he counted down the page. It was indeed a disaster -- a fatal one. He came to the end and then reread the last sentence. "Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Just hold the phone. What's wrong here -- the next-to-last mark?"

Brother Julio took back the paper and read the last line. "*Its the only way to stop poeple getting away with murdur.*" Aside from the three misspellings, it's ungrammatical. A participle in this construction has to be governed by a possessive. Technically, it should be *people's getting away with murder*, as clumsy as that may sound."

"I don't agree with you on that one," said Harold.

"It's traditional grammar, Harold. I'm sure your high school textbook would say as much."

"Look, it's a grey area sometimes with these participles! Don't be so dogmatic!"

"Dogmatic?" Brother Julio turned to his colleagues.

"He's telling us not to be dogmatic?" Dominic and Francisco broke up laughing. "Harold, we're Catholics," he said, with a condescending smile. "What do you expect from us?"

Brother Dominic looked at the line in question. "Yes, that's definitely wrong. You could stop them *from* getting away with murder."

Brother Francisco had a look as well. "Yes, no doubt of it. You need either *from* or the possessive *people's*."

Harold's eyes were wet. "You wouldn't execute a man over a participle, would you?"

Brother Julio shrugged. "Why not? It's as good a reason as any."

"I demand an expert opinion! You're not an expert!"

"I'm more than sufficiently qualified."

"I DEMAND ANOTHER OPINION!" shouted Harold angrily. "I wish to appeal! To a higher court, so to speak!"

Brother Julio exchanged looks with his colleagues. Then he capped his pen and put it back inside his robe. "Very well." He went over to the phone and dialed an extension. "Let me have Brother Louis, please." He covered the mouthpiece and said to Harold, "Brother Louis is the final authority, but you'll see he'll back me up on this...Hello? Brother Louis? Would you please come upstairs and settle an argument?...Yes, very good." He hung up. "He's with another pris--uh, client, but he's coming right up."

"This is better than television," said Vinnie, still grinning. "Are you really going to kill Mr. Ober?"

"It looks that way," said Brother Julio.

"Gee, Mr. Ober, I'm really sorry. You forgive me, don't you?"

"Forgive you! Forgive you! I should have failed you! I should have had you expelled! This is what I get for being a nice guy!"

"Gee, don't take it so personal."

There was a knock at the door, and Brother Francisco let Brother Louis in. Brother Louis was a much younger man than his colleagues and, it appeared to Harold, less severe in his manner. His walk was relaxed, his expression mild.

"Ah, Brother Louis. You must settle a question of grammar," said Brother Julio, handing him Vinnie's essay. "Read the last sentence, and tell me what you see besides three misspellings."

Brother Louis took the paper and looked at it. "Well... there's a fused participle there."

"Fused participle!" said Brother Julio, snapping his fingers. "I knew there was a term for it. There, you see, Harold? Vincent wrote a fused participle!" He turned to Vinnie and smacked him on the shoulder convivially. "A fused participle, my boy! You wrote a fused participle!"

"Yeah? No shit!"

"I say it's allowable," Harold squeaked.

"Heretic!" snarled Brother Julio, reaching for Brother



Dominic's sword. "Confess to your sins and I'll make this as painless as possible!"

"Uh...", said Brother Louis, holding up his index finger. "Excuse me, but we have a grey area of grammar here."

"Aha! I told you!" exclaimed Harold.

"What do you mean?" asked Brother Julio.

"Well, there are really two schools of thought on this point. The Fowlerites have condemned the fused participle, but Onions and other authorities have presented a good case for it. Pragmatically, it's a question of sense and ambiguity, and, to some extent, euphony. Now this usage here," he went on, indicating Vinnie's essay. "A case can be made for this."

Brother Julio frowned. "Don't beat around the bush, Louis. Would you allow it or not? Yes or no?"

Brother Louis cocked his head slightly, as if looking at an abstract painting. "Yes, I would allow it."

"HA! HA!" shouted Harold. "I MADE IT!"

"I should look for something else to mark wrong!" hissed Brother Julio, knowing full well that he had not missed anything. "Okay, untie him." He cursed under his breath.

Brother Francisco untied him as Brother Louis left the room. Brother Julio handed Vinnie a crisp, new fifty, and Vinnie scampered out happily, calling back over his shoulder, "Bye, Mr. Ober! Sorry I scared the shit out of you with that fuse parsipal!"

Harold stood up and rubbed the circulation back into his wrists. Brother Julio glared at him. Harold coughed nervously. "Well...uh..." He could think of nothing to say.

Brother Julio grabbed him by the arm and marched him out through the door on the opposite side of the room. They walked swiftly through a different maze of corridors until finally they came to the building's side door. Brother Julio opened it, and the bright June daylight flooded over them.

"Uh, just a minute," said Harold. "I almost forgot. What about my toaster?"

A look of rage came over Brother Julio. "You son of a bitch! You're lucky to get out of here alive!" And so saying, he pushed Harold out and slammed the door behind him.

Harold now stood by himself, a free man. He was suddenly aware that he was drenched with sweat. His heart was still pounding, and his mouth was dry. *I almost got killed!* he thought. He looked around, taking a moment to orient himself. Then he headed toward the parking lot.

As he headed for his old Citroen, he saw an old man in a clerical collar standing by the door of another car. His white hair was disheveled, and he held his face in his hands, weeping.

Harold approached him, hesitated a moment, then finally walked up to the man. "Sir? Are you all right?"

The man turned to Harold, his pale blue eyes awash with tears. "I'll bet you think *you've* got a tough one! Look at what they gave *me!*" And he thrust a slip of paper at Harold. It read as follows:

WANTED  
TWO POWERFUL NEGROES  
TO ADMINISTER DAILY WHIPPINGS  
TO YOUNG GIRL  
CALL REV. C. MORTON  
Area code (416) 592-1338

"I don't get it," said Harold.

The minister took back the paper, his hand shaking. "I have to run this as a full-page ad in the Oral Roberts University student newspaper -- *or else!*" He ran a finger across his throat and made a scritchng sound.

"Oh," said Harold gravely. "I don't see how you'll be able to manage that. But see here, why don't you just run away?"

The minister put a hand on Harold's shoulder. "I can't, my friend." He nodded toward the building. "They're holding my wife." Then he got into his car, started the badly-tuned engine, and sputtered away, trailing a little cloud of grey smoke.

Harold watched the receding car for a few moments, then went to his Citroen and got in. The heat had built up inside it. He lowered the window to let it escape. Sweat rolled down his forehead.

Picture a shaken -- shall we say even *humbled* -- Harold Ober, guiding his little car out of the parking lot of

Titan-Torque Electric. How will he explain his coming home without the old Supremo toaster? But this, after all, is no great problem. Any little excuse will satisfy Marion when he surprises her with a top-of-the-line Proctor-Silex, shows off his new pair of Florsheims, and teases her to go see what's parked in the driveway.

## A WELL-ADJUSTED MAN

When Mr. Beeton saw the little sign over the receptionist's desk that said *Back in 20 Minutes*, he was going to sit down and wait. But the man in the inner office caught sight of him through the partly open door and said, "Mr. Beeton?"

"Yes," said Mr. Beeton from the doorway.

"Come in and have a seat. I'm Dr. Humphrey."

So Mr. Beeton came in, shut the door behind him, and sat in the chair across the desk from the doctor. Dr. Humphrey wore a hideous orange suit, his hair was slightly wild, his tie was loose, he wore thick glasses, and had a moustache like a small brush. "No, over there," he said, pointing to the couch.

Mr. Beeton sat up, startled. "On the couch?"

"If you please."

"Do I have to?"

Dr. Humphrey mused over his appointment calendar. "It says *Mr. Beeton--New Patient*. Patients lie on the couch, Mr. Beeton. Psychiatrists sit in chairs."

"Oh, well, okay," said Mr. Beeton, with a self-conscious smile. Dr. Humphrey did not smile. From certain angles the reflections on his glasses turned his eyes into opaque white disks.

Dr. Humphrey moved to another chair at the end of the couch behind Beeton's head, just out of his view. "Now, then, what's the matter?"

"Well, ha, ha, nothing really. That is--"

"Nothing? What do you mean, *nothing*?" he demanded.

"Well, uh, it's sort of a wager, just a sort of, well, private thing with some of the fellows at the office."

"Mmm?"

"You see, we're always talking about things, and--"

"Things? What things?"

Mr. Beeton had to twist his neck to face the doctor, but now he straightened himself and just looked at the ceiling.

"Oh, well, sex and stuff like that."

"Really," said Dr. Humphrey with faint amusement.

"Yes, well, you see, we were talking about being well-

adjusted, like, in one's masculine role, and then somehow we got into an argument about how a person knows he's well-adjusted, and I said, 'I know I'm well-adjusted,' and we got into this discussion, like, so when somebody suggested I let a psychiatrist decide whether I'm well-adjusted, I said, 'Fine, I'm sure any psychiatrist would say I'm well-adjusted.'" He twisted his head enough to catch Dr. Humphrey's expression. It was serious, bordering on contempt. "So anyway, I thought, well, it would be good to know anyway, and maybe fun. So, you see, it's partly on a bet and partly to prove to myself I'm...uh, normal."

Dr. Humphrey stood up, faced Mr. Beeton, and said, "Take your clothes off!"

"Huh?"

"Take your clothes off this instant!"

"But why?"

"I'm a doctor, aren't I? A psychiatrist is a medical doctor."

"Well--"

"A medical doctor has the right to examine a patient."

"But I didn't come here to be examined," whined Mr. Beeton.

A pause. "I see," said Dr. Humphrey. "So, you're afraid of exposing your body."

"No, no!"

"You have a hang-up about nudity! Hmph! *Well-adjusted!*"

"I don't have any hang-ups," said Mr. Beeton, sitting up. "Oh, all right, I'll take my clothes off." And he did, with annoyance. "There." Ordinary Mr. Beeton sat on the side of the couch with his ordinary body. He couldn't decide whether to cover his crotch or not, so he crossed one leg over the other, tucking his genitals underneath. He looked out the window that faced an apartment building. They were on the sixth floor. There was a long silence. Finally, he looked at the psychiatrist. "Well?"

"Well, what?"

"You said you wanted to examine me."

"I am."

Beeton cleared his throat. It was very dry. If only the doctor would write on a pad or do regular doctor things. But, no. He sat in the chair, resting his head in his hand, his expression inscrutable.



"What leads you to believe you're well-adjusted?"

"Do you want me to get dressed now?"

"Do you feel you need to be dressed?"

Beeton weighed the question. Suddenly all his reasoning faculties seemed faulty. "Well, I, uh..."

"Are you uncomfortable?"

"Oh, no, no. Perfectly fine."

"Good. Now answer my question."

"What's that?"

"Why do you think you're well-adjusted?"

"Um..."

"Take your time. Take all the time you need."

Beeton was sweating. "Because, uh, well, my mind and body, uh, are...in harmony, like."

"Are they?"

"I think so. I mean, I always considered--"

"Can you get an erection?"

"Of course," said Beeton, and in his mind's eye his penis shrank to the size of a cocktail shrimp.

"Then get one," said the psychiatrist.

"What?"

"Get one," he repeated, his expression cool and superior.

"What, now?"

"Sure."

Beads of sweat dripped onto the couch. "You mean right here in front of you?" he exclaimed.

"I won't look." Dr. Humphrey turned his chair around.

"See, my back is turned."

"But--"

"You ought to be able to get one in sixty seconds." He took out a stopwatch.

"But I just can't do it like that!" said Beeton, voice close to breaking.

"Sure you can, if your mind and body are in harmony." There was a click. "Okay, I'm starting you off. Go."

"But..." The psychiatrist's back was turned as he watched the time. "But...Now, look, I just can't, I mean, hell..." The seconds ticked away. "This is ridiculous!"

"Thirty seconds."

"Well, forget it, I'm not going to!"

Another click stopped the watch. Dr. Humphrey got up and came over to the couch. He sat beside Beeton and put



his arm around his shoulder in apparent sympathy. "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

Beeton cleared his throat. "I don't think so." Dr. Humphrey's hand felt like ice. Beeton looked down at the floor.

"You're not bothered by *this*, are you?" He patted Beeton's shoulder for emphasis. Beeton shook his head slightly. "A well-adjusted man wouldn't be."

"I'm not bothered," said Beeton bravely.

"Good. Tell me, do you ever have peculiar thoughts?"

Beeton wanted to shift away from the doctor, but his ass seemed glued with sweat to the leather couch. "Peculiar thoughts?"

"Ever think about your mother sexually?"

"My mother? No. Absolutely not."

"Never?"

"Never."

A pause. "Is she that ugly?"

"No, she's not ugly."

"Is she attractive?"

"Um, well, when she was younger, she was."

"You remember that, do you?" The psychiatrist nodded. Beeton blushed and was about to protest. "Do you have any sisters?"

"Why, yes, I do...have one, that is."

"Is she pretty?"

Beeton wanted a drink of water desperately. He felt nauseous. "Well, yes, actually, she is, but not--"

"Ever want to have intercourse with her?"

"No, of course not! Not with my own sis--" He coughed violently, holding his mouth, trying to get some spit down his throat to recover himself.

"You know," said the psychiatrist, crossing his legs casually, "it's quite normal -- *perfectly* normal, in fact -- to have sexual thoughts about one's family." A pause.

"Yet you say you don't."

Beeton chanced a glance at him, then looked back at the floor. *Why am I here?* he thought. *Why did I have to come here? I should have left well enough alone!*

"You must be repressed," said the psychiatrist.

"Repressed? Me?"

"Of course. I can prove it. Tell me..." He shook

Beeton's shoulder fraternally. "Ever think about men?"

"What do you mean?" Beeton demanded angrily.

"I think you know very well what I mean. Why do you avoid looking me in the eye?"

*Damn it, I'll look at your ugly face!* he thought. But in that instant he realized that he couldn't! He couldn't! *My God, could it mean...*

"Mr. Beeton, you must be truthful. Now, deep down, everyone has a homosexual thought or two."

It was too much. Beeton got up from the couch, the leather making a rasping sound as his skin separated from it. "All your damn questions!" he said, trembling, back turned to the psychiatrist. "I mean, everything you say, it's like...well, it's like you're trying to get me to say all the wrong things! No matter what I say, it sounds bad! It's just not fair!"

"Mm hmm," said Dr. Humphrey. "Well, I don't want you to think I'm badgering you, Mr. Beeton. No, no. I want you to feel free to *express* yourself in your own way." He got up, walked over to the balcony door, and slid it open. The breeze felt good to Beeton. Dr. Humphrey faced him, smiling. "You're not doing too well so far, but, look, I'll give you a fair chance to redeem yourself." His gaze pierced Beeton like a sword through the heart. "I *do* want you to vent your deepest thoughts in your own words," he said. "So would you please step out here--" He beckoned to the balcony. "And sing a song that summarizes your sexual attitudes?"

Beeton trembled even more. "I don't understand. You want--"

"I *said*...would you please step out here and sing a song that summarizes your sexual attitudes?"

"You mean you want me to go out on the balcony? Naked?" he screeched.

"Yes, get out there."

Beeton stepped forward tentatively. "But..." The psychiatrist pointed to the balcony, as if ordering a bad dog to leave the room. "But," whined Beeton, on the verge of tears.

"It's best to get it over with."

Mr. Beeton, covering his crotch as best he could, stepped slowly out onto the balcony. Street noises floated

up the six stories. A jet plane flew overhead. The cement was rough under his feet. It was like a dream he'd once had. Certainly, an *abnormal* dream.

"Now sing a song."

"What song?"

"You have to make one up."

"Make one up? I can't make up a song!"

"Tsk! Tsk! Mr. Beeton! You can't get an erection, and you can't make up a song! What *can* you do, Mr. Beeton?"

"All right, I'll try! I'll try!"

"Good."

"Ummm...What was that again? A song about my sexual attitudes?"

"Yes, and face out that way. Sing to the world."

Beeton cleared his throat. "*Ohh...*" he sang, uncertainly. "*Ohhh...*" He tried another key.

"*Oh, I think it's nice to be a man*

*Oh, I think...it's nice to be a man*

*I like to...uh, I like to have sex if I can*

*Because...because I'm like any well-adjusted man..."*

He turned around and caught Dr. Humphrey grinning, in fact barely able to contain his laughter. Mr. Beeton rushed inside. "There!" he spat furiously. "I sang a goddamn song, and now I'm getting dressed, and that's it! I've had it!" He reached for his clothes.

Dr. Humphrey watched him as he almost fell down trying to put on his pants. The psychiatrist went over to his desk, opened a folder, and began writing. He went on writing with quick, vigorous strokes, and by the time Beeton was finished dressing, Dr. Humphrey had written quite a lot. "You realize you'll have to come back," he said without looking up, and at this, Mr. Beeton broke down in tears, collapsing into the nearest chair. The psychiatrist went on writing.

"I never thought..." Mr. Beeton sobbed. "I...I never thought there was anything the matter with me." He took out his handkerchief and covered his face. "It's like going for a check-up and being told you have cancer! In fact, I'd rather have cancer!"

Dr. Humphrey put down his pen. "I think you can be helped. Possibly, anyway." He sat back in the swivel chair. "May take years, of course." He watched Beeton's

pained expression. "Either that or it's the sanitarium for you." He looked out the window calmly as Mr. Beeton broke into a fresh fit of sobbing.

"I...I guess...I guess I'm not...well-adjusted...not really...well-adjusted at all..." He looked to Dr. Humphrey for sympathy, but the doctor merely shook his head, lips pursed in abstract thought.

The psychiatrist was leaning over the appointment calendar when suddenly the office door burst open to reveal a tall, thin man in a grey suit, who said, "Oh, so it's you again, Mr. Lamprey!" He walked toward the desk and put his hand on the back of the swivel chair. "I've warned you before about this!" He unseated the man in the orange suit.

"What is this?" asked Mr. Beeton. "Who are you?"

"I'm Dr. Humphrey," the tall man answered, as he escorted the orange-suited man toward the door.

"Then who is *this*?" asked Beeton, pointing to his inquirer, who now grinned at him perversely.

"This is Mr. Lamprey, another patient of mine. A bit of a joker, I'm afraid." He spoke to the impostor. "Mr. Lamprey, we're going to have a very serious talk about this when you come in on Wednesday." Mr. Lamprey was out the door.

Beeton jumped up. "THEN IT DOESN'T COUNT! IT DOESN'T COUNT!" he shouted with an idiotic grin. "NONE OF IT COUNTS! HA! HA!"

"You're Mr. Beeton, I assume," said the real Dr. Humphrey.

"YES! YES!"

"Well, have a seat and let's--"

"NO! NO! I'M BETTER! I'M BETTER!" he exclaimed, backing toward the door.

"Are you sure? Perhaps you'd just like to--"

"NO, REALLY, I'M FINE! JUST FINE! IT'S ALL RIGHT! I'LL SEND YOU A CHEQUE! TWO CHEQUES! GOOD-BYE!" And in a flash he was gone.



## A COWBOY STORY

The sun was setting slowly in the west, tingeing the clouds with red and purple highlights, as Cowboy Bob patted his trusty palomino, Chips, affectionately on the neck and they headed for home, reveling in the glory of their day of adventure. The new land was big and harsh and often dangerous, but thanks to men like Bob it would be a land of promise for decent, hard-working folks. Bob rubbed an old bullet wound absent-mindedly and chuckled to himself as he thought about the showdown at the Double-K Corral. The Seborg Gang had finally been caught, and the sheepherders and cattle ranchers had finally settled their differences. He let his mind recall these and other adventures as Chips followed the trail home without the need of guidance from his master. Ah, *home*. Bob could see the house now in the twilight. Mom and Dad and Sis and little Jimmy would all be waiting. He patted his horse once more. "Well, pardner, we're home again."

Bob tied Chips to the post beside the house and looked around him. The road in front of the house marked the legal limits of the city. High-rise condominiums, gas stations, and a shopping centre filled his view. And on his own side of the street, bulldozers stood unattended amid the signs of incipient construction. His was the only family dwelling on his side of the road for a long distance. He filled a pail of water with the garden hose, set it before Chips and walked into the house.

His parents, his younger brother, his sister and her husband were already eating. They were sitting before the TV in the living room eating a giant pepperoni pizza. They were watching *Championship Bowling*.

Bob swacked his leggings with his cowboy hat, sending a cloud of dust into the air. "Hoo-wee! What a day!"

His parents, around sixty years of age, smiled faintly. "Did you have fun, dear?" asked his mother.

"Fun? Well, now, I wouldn't exactly call it *fun*. That Seborg Gang, well, I'll tell you..."

"Turn it up a bit," said his father to Jimmy, who

turned up the sound on the TV just in time to magnify the crash of ten pins going down. "Good shot," said the father.

"Yeah, the spin was just right," said Jimmy.

"It's all footwork," observed Reg, the husband of Bob's sister, Kathleen. "And the release. Can't forget that," he added.

Bob pulled a folding chair up near the coffee table, turned it around and sat down the wrong way, his hands resting on the back of the chair. "You know, it's a good feeling to stand up for what's right, you know, to speak the truth and defend it."

"Yes, it is," said Kathleen. "Want some pizza?"

Bob grinned. "Pizza, eh? Well, now, I was hoping for a big steak and some beans and black coffee." He grinned all around, to no effect.

*Crash! "Oh, he leaves the seven and the ten! Tough break!..."*

"He's got a seven-ten split," said Bob's mother.

"He'll never make that," said Bob's father.

Bob reached over with a dirty hand and picked up a piece of pizza. "Reckon I will have a piece after all. A man's got to learn to adapt to all sorts of conditions. I remember once after I got bushwhacked by some Indians I had to eat snakes and cactus to live."

"Ugh," said Kathleen, not taking her eyes away from the TV.

Reg looked at his watch and said to his wife, "Are we going to bingo or not?"

"Sure."

A commercial for tires came on. Bob's father said to him, "Oh, Reg has something to tell you."

"Yeah? What is it, Reg?"

"I can get you a job at my company if you want. They're hiring for the stockroom."

"Stockroom?" he chuckled. "Me, work in a stockroom? Hell, I'd die of suffocation. I need the outdoors, the smell of good, clean dirt, the feel of the rain in my face, the fresh breeze, the sun on my back." He took out his six-shooter and twirled it around. "A man needs a challenge, a test, something to pit himself against. I tell you, this is a big land, a tough--"

"I think you'd better get yourself a steady job, Bobby,"

said his father. "Money doesn't grow on trees. It costs a lot to keep a house."

"Why, heck, if the old homestead is at stake, I'd be glad to. But I had some big plans I didn't tell you about. Listen, there's gold up in--"

"You'd better apply for a job tomorrow, otherwise they'll be all gone," said Reg.

Bob leaned back a bit. The breath seemed to go out of him. "Why, sure, sure. I'll do it." He shifted his ass as if sitting on something sharp. "Just what kind of work is it?"

"Stockroom work. You move boxes around all day mostly."

"Boxes of what?"

"Dog biscuits."

"Dog biscuits?"

"Yeah."

The tenth frame ended with a decisive defeat of the champ. The successful challenger remarked to the commentator, *"I play hypnosis records to relax my mind and help me concentrate. My average has gone up almost thirty points since I been going to my hypnotist."*

Kathleen stood up. "Anybody want to go to bingo with us?"

"Not me," said Bob's father.

Kathleen looked at Jimmy. "How about bingo?"

"Are you kidding? That's not for me. I'm going out with the guys."

"Atta boy!" said Bob. "There's nothing like a bunch of young guys out for adventure. Where are you going?"

"Over to the donut shop. Vinny is going to show us his new carburetor."

Kathleen and Reg said a quick goodbye and left. Jimmy was close behind, heading for his car.

Bob announced to his parents, "Maybe I'll mosey on over to the saloon and see Kitty."

"The saloon ain't there no more, or haven't you noticed?" said his father, nodding in the direction of the construction.

"What? You mean the saloon ain't there no more?"

"That's what I said. All those old buildings are coming down."

"For what?"

"A Jewish old age home."

Bob put his half-eaten piece of pizza back in the box. *Hollywood Squares* came on. "Can I turn that off?"

"Sure. I'm going to take a nap."

Bob's mother picked up the plates and glasses. Bob followed her into the kitchen. "Mom?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Um...Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course, dear."

"What does--" His words were washed out by the rush of water from the tap. He raised his voice. "WHAT DOES A PERSON DO FOR HEMORRHOIDS?"

His mother shut off the tap. "Hemorrhoids?"

"Yeah. I think I got hemorrhoids. You know how it is. All day in the saddle. You know what I mean."

"You can get some *Preparation H* in the drugstore tomorrow."

"Would I have to go to the doctor?"

"Only if it's serious."

He felt the crack of his ass tentatively.

"Oh, by the way," said his mother. "You have to turn in your gun to the police."

"What? My gun? You want me to turn in my gun? Mom, a man ain't a man without a gun."

"You have no license for it."

"License? Hell, a man needs protection out there, and--"

"The police came by. I called them. You see, they have this amnesty program for handguns. They don't charge you for having a gun if you give it to them during the next two weeks. I said you'd be back late tonight, and they said they'd be here first thing tomorrow morning."

"My six-shooter. My good old six-shooter. Imagine going up against Big Ed Egan or the Phillips boys without a gun."

"They left a plastic bag for the gun and a form to fill out to get compensation from the county."

Bob shook his head and walked back into the living room. He saw the plastic bag and a yellow piece of paper on the table by the telephone. He took the gun from his holster and laid it down. He thought about a certain night and a certain poker game that got out of hand. He longed for some



of that noise and excitement, and a bottle of his favorite whiskey. Then he realized that it was Sunday. All the bars were closed.

He stood daydreaming for a long time, gazing at an old photo of himself on the bookcase -- himself at the age of six, dressed in a handsome black cowboy suit. He went to the front window and looked out. Some sort of accident had occurred on the road, but it was too far away to see clearly. At that moment a boy ran up the wooden steps to the front door. Bob recognized him as the local newspaper boy. He opened the door. "Yes?" he said.

"Hey, mister, you own a horse, don't you?"

"Why, yes. He's tied to the post around the side."

"No, he's not."

"He's not? Oh, my God! What happened?"

"He just got run over by a truck."

"OH, GOD!" screamed Bob as he ran past the boy toward the scene of the accident.

A crowd of people stood gawking and talking excitedly around the spot where the carting company truck had knocked Chips down. The horse's blood made a black pool in the glow of the street lights. There were *Oohs* and *Aahs* of excitement and the occasional "Far out!"

"Chips! Chips!" cried Bob, rushing to embrace the smashed head of his horse. "Oh, Chips! Oh, Chips! You saved me from Big Joe Wollock. You saved me at the Valdez Pass. Oh, my poor Chips!" He bent down and kissed Chips on the neck.

"Hey, look at that guy! He kissed the horse!"

"God, what a pervert!"

"He must be crazy!"

Bob sobbed into Chips's cream-colored mane. Neither his tears nor his caresses were felt by the horse, which was dead. He saw the blood leaking from the broken head. A flashing red light was now reflected in Chips's right eye. "Fuckin' far out, man! Fuckin' far out!" he heard someone say. He looked up at the crowd. A policeman with a clipboard was approaching.

## About the Author

Crad Kilodney is a self-taught writer whose short stories and other writings have appeared in more than sixty magazines and anthologies in Canada, the U.S., and Britain. Since 1978, he has been selling his privately published books on the streets of Toronto. His private imprint is Charnel House. He has also had story collections published by Virgo Press and Coach House Press.

Kilodney was born in the Borough of Queens, New York City, in 1948 and moved to Canada in 1973. He has a degree in astronomy from the University of Michigan but abandoned his scientific career soon after his graduation. Until 1978, he worked at a variety of jobs, most of them connected in some way with books. Since then, he has devoted himself entirely to his literary career and has lived well below the poverty line. Nevertheless, all his private editions have sold well and turned a profit, and his early titles are considered to be collectors' items.



Toronto's notorious "street author," Crad Kilodney, is back with this new collection of satirical stories -- often hilarious, sometimes sad, but always entertaining. In BANG HEADS HERE, SUFFERING BASTARDS, you will meet:

\*Gerald Mullen, a Canadian writer who, while attending the opera, accidentally sneezes on the neck of the publisher to whom he has just submitted his manuscript.

\*Harold Ober, who sets out on the simple errand of having his old toaster repaired and falls into the hands of some very sinister men.

\*Mr. Beeton, who goes to a psychiatrist on a bet to prove how well-adjusted he is and lives to regret it.

\*Cowboy Bob, a man out of step with the modern world, whose obsolescence is brought home to him in the most painful and humiliating fashion.

\*\*\*\*\*

"There's a twisted genius living in Toronto who deserves to be widely read and anthologized. His name is Crad Kilodney. ....It's surprising to this critic that Kilodney's work isn't more widely known." -- Richard Peabody, *The Mill*

"A wonderfully funny, supple writer." -- Bill Cameron, CBC

"A first-rate underground writer." -- York Univ. *Excalibur*

"Kilodney is a mad scientist/sociologist working with the world as his laboratory." -- *Small Press Review*

"Kilodney is like Woody Allen on Quaaludes." -- Univ. of Toronto *newspaper*

CHARNEL HOUSE  
ISBN 0-9690261-6-1